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NMCB 25 Public Affairs

FORT HUNTER LIGGETT, Calif. – Seabees from Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 25 (NMCB 25), Fort McCoy, Wisc., are well aware of the benefits of receiving military training from active-duty Seabee instructors. Many NMCB 25 Seabees increased their active duty integration capabilities recently during Military Year (M-Year) 2004 training at Fort Hunter Liggett, Calif.

Textbook integration of Reserve and active-duty Seabee units isn't something that

DUTY INSTRUCTOR RESERVE TRAINING

happens without aligning training methods well in advance of recall notices. Shouldering the responsibility of active and Reserve Seabee military training for the entire West Coast is the responsibility of 31st Seabee Readiness Group (SRG), Port Hueneme, Calif. The 31st SRG trains two to three Reserve battalions every year.

Military training at Fort Hunter Liggett is essential to the very survival of NMCB units. No one knows this better than BUC(SCW) Eric Davis, leading chief petty officer of the 31st SRG.

"We're a big target out there. Construction workers are very valuable," Davis said. "Marines have their mission to do and we have ours. We can't rely on somebody else to watch over and defend us. We have to be able to take care of ourselves."

Many students couldn't help but think about the ongoing military effort in Iraq in terms of M-year weapons training. CE2 Howard Lamere, a civilian construction electrician, appreciated the attention to detail that instructors provided.

"The learning environment was great. Good instructors that actually came from the war," Lamere said. "They were able to give us a lot of real-life scenarios of how the guns were

deployed."

Training by the same group of 31st SRG instructors ensures an identical education base for these Reserve and active-duty Seabees. Once a cohesive foundation of weapons training is achieved, Reserve and active-duty Seabees can work together to solve tactical issues. Reserve Seabees also benefit by receiving first hand accounts of lessons learned from active-duty Seabees. Instructors keep abreast of current world situations and any effect they may have on training. The 31st SRG currently has three instructors that returned from Iraq.

"It does make a difference. I try and incorporate that information into what we are teaching, but we are also careful about not just teaching about the last war," Davis said. "We're not going to just teach about how to do things in Iraq, because the students I'm teaching today may never go back to Iraq."

SK3 Class Kurtis Noack, a member of the NMCB 25 60mm mortar platoon, agreed.

"I feel the best preparation is being flexible. From the sounds of it, assignments may be completely different than a person's rate on a day-to-day basis," Noack said. "You do what needs to be done for the sake of the mission."

The ability to adapt under challenging situations is an attribute Seabees understand very well.

During their mission in Iraq, NMCB 4, an active-duty battalion, was asked to complete a project they had never done before. "We hadn't done Mabey-Johnson style bridges before, but NMCB 4 just did that, and they were just learning how to build these - that was the first time they had ever done it," said Davis.

Active or Reserve, it is the Seabees core knowledge of construction techniques that makes them so valuable.

"There are things that we practice in the active battalion that civilians don't normally do, but I can't say that helps or hurts. The Reserves not only bring their trade skills, but they have the diversity of each other's unique project background," Davis said.

SRG military training creates the mission flexibility Seabees need to operate effectively. This "Can Do" flexibility is reflected in the Seabees extensive construction capabilities. Military training, an essential component of Seabee training, compliments the rate training that most Seabees in the Reserve units practice on a daily basis in the civilian sector.

Since the creation of Naval Construction Battalions during WWII, the Navy has continually capitalized on this ready resource of highly motivated and skilled professionals. Active-duty Seabee instructors closely observe both Reserve and active-duty students during military training evolutions. While active-

duty Seabees reap the benefits of longer training hours, Davis doesn't see this as a constraint.

"There are no real limitations or differences between the active and Reserve," Davis said. "An active unit is just going to have a little more experience because they are active. I know Reserves integrate just fine with the active. At first, sure, there are some differences, but they're smart, they're skilled, and they're ready to learn. It just takes the Reserves a couple of weeks to get up to speed, which is perfectly understandable, but they have no problems getting right in there, working with the active duty, and performing the same jobs that the actives do."

Seabees in Reserve units know they are expected to learn a lot of information during annual training cycles, such as M-year. The attitude of most students during M-year wasn't about how much information they had to learn, but rather how much they could obtain.

Many students spent limited breaks obtaining further information or acquiring a higher skill level with weapons. During the initial phase of training, an average of 74 students attended volunteer training classes after scheduled work hours. These Seabee Combat Warfare (SCW) classes are an essential part of the Personnel Qualification Standards (PQS) program.

According to UT2 Timothy Doyle, "It was long, long hours. We had 12 to 14 hour days - sometimes longer. The training environment was good. High paced, but everybody realized that it was going to be a lot of information in a very short time."

BU1(SCW) William Kettle, a Minnesota licensed general contractor, was just as enthusiastic about M-year training.

"Hands down, the M224 mortar training was the best training I have received in 17 years in the Naval Reserve! It was mentally challenging, the hours were long, but I really learned a lot," Kettle said. "It is great to know that if we have to, we can and will send a large amount of firepower on to the enemy, defending our shipmates, our fellow service members, or possibly ourselves."

NMCB 25 Seabees understand their mission, which is to provide and maintain a trained, ready, and immediately available organized Reserve force capable of responding to the requirements of the Naval Construction Force.

Beyond M-year, Seabees receive additional training to sharpen their military and construction skills in alignment with integration goals. Through civilian construction projects and professional military training by the 31st SRG, NMCB 25 will continue to demonstrate the fighting Seabee spirit. "Seabees - Can Do!" ♦